United Nations A/C.1/52/PV.11

General Assembly
Fifty-second session

Official Records

First Committee
11th Meeting
Thursday, 23 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Nkgowe . . . . . (Botswana)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda items 62 to 82 (*continued*)

General debate on all disarmament and international security items

Mr. Guillén (Peru) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to see you presiding over the First Committee and we salute your predecessor in that office. We also welcome the election of the other officers of the Committee.

While agreeing with the earlier joint statement by the members of the Rio Group, the delegation of Peru would like to draw special attention to several subjects that the Committee is considering.

Peru's commitment to peace and development through general and complete disarmament is constant and resolute. We want to contribute decisively to the establishment of an international order based on respect for commitments entered into under treaties and other pillars of international law, and the principles of the United Nations Charter, with a view to achieving a world of peace and sustainable development.

Peru was one of the first countries to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in September 1996. I am pleased to be able to report that last Monday, 20 October, the Government of Peru ratified that international agreement and that in a few days Peru will be depositing its instrument of ratification here at Headquarters. Although that Treaty is an important step, some fundamental decisions remain unimplemented, particularly by the nuclear Powers. It is essential that the will to achieve nuclear disarmament be evinced in a simultaneous manner through sustained, clear-cut and direct decisions.

We hope that the urgent need for nuclear disarmament will be reflected in concrete deeds. We make a special appeal to all States to assume their responsibilities in this regard so that the Treaty may promptly enter into force.

We must now take determined action to move forward positively towards a world free from the nuclear threat and the new spectre: proliferation. To that end, we submitted in the Conference on Disarmament, with other countries in the Group of 21, a Proposal for a Programme of Action for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

The speedy commencement and rapid conclusion of good-faith negotiations to achieve nuclear disarmament in all its aspects, under strict and effective international control, in accordance with the unanimous opinion of the International Court of Justice, is of paramount importance to the future of the international community.

We welcome the entry into force of the Bangkok Treaty, which establishes a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South-East Asia. That international agreement joins the Tlatelolco system in Latin America and the Caribbean, a system which has been in existence for 30 years; the Treaty of Rarotonga and its Protocols in the South Pacific; the Pelindaba Treaty in Africa; and the treaty covering Antarctica. This shows that the people of the world demand a future of peace, free from the threat of those indiscriminate weapons.

97-86302 (E)

This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Our Government, which has long stressed the need for greater links between the various regional agreements on nuclear-weapon-free zones, fully supports cooperation between nuclear-weapon-free zones in the southern hemisphere.

Peru views as particularly important the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force last April and which has to date been signed by 100 States parties. We believe that the commitment and real support of the States parties will make it possible for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to oversee the effective implementation of the Treaty. As a State party, Peru is complying with all of the obligations contained in the Convention.

We believe that there is an important and urgent need for progress in conventional disarmament in all its aspects. Most conflicts that we have witnessed in recent years demonstrate that violence and death in war have been intensified by increasingly lethal weapons that are being further developed.

Moreover, our country is also firmly committed to the effort to achieve the ultimate goal of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines, which kill and mutilate non-combatant civilians. That is why we deposited our instrument of ratification of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or To Have Indiscriminate Effects, as well as its additional Protocols — in particular, Protocol II — with the United Nations Secretariat last July.

From the outset, Peru has actively participated in the Ottawa process and intends to sign in December the convention prohibiting the use, stockpiling, manufacture and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. The success of an international instrument of this kind will depend specifically on the will and universal commitment to ensure such a ban.

We believe that conventional disarmament can make significant progress in our region. In this respect, the efforts being made by the Organization of American States (OAS) to develop a concept of hemispheric security and to make progress in its own confidence-building machinery can contribute to that. Of particular importance are the Santiago Declaration and the next follow-up conference to be held in 1998 in El Salvador. Peru also attaches special importance to bilateral confidence-building consultations.

Peru has consistently promoted confidence-building as a prerequisite for peace, disarmament and development. It has also promoted the imposition of limits on weapons acquisitions as an important step in confidence-building, particularly on the regional level. In 1991, we supported the establishment of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and have, since 1993, annually submitted the requested information. This is fitting conduct for a country that adapts its international behaviour to the principles, purposes and norms of the Charters of the United Nations and the OAS. We attach particular importance to the functioning and credibility of the Register. All States should supply information on schedule.

We feel that all approaches to, or activities for, disarmament are closely connected to the process of the economic and social development of every people. Our country has always promoted the principle that all resources released by disarmament should be used for economic and social development. We also believe that the concepts of security and peace are closely connected to social, economic, humanitarian and environmental aspects that must be considered in tandem with military questions.

Finally, I would refer to the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. We believe that, in the near future, conditions should allow us to use the Centre, with no implications for the United Nations regular budget, to promote new ideas that are currently emerging from these meetings.

We believe that, in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, there has been considerable progress towards disarmament, in which we have on occasion been pioneers. We firmly believe that the possibility of the United Nations projecting, reflecting and reporting on any progress made in that connection can be highlighted by an institution such as that created through the relevant United Nations resolutions of past years.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, the delegation of Chile wishes to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. You can count on our cooperation and support in your important tasks. We also warmly congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

There is no doubt that, since the end of bipolar confrontation, considerable progress has been made in controlling and reducing weapons. This year, we wish to emphasize the establishment of the Provisional Technical

Secretariat of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) Organization, which was the opening task for the complex verification system established under the Treaty — a central element in the credibility of that legal instrument.

In this respect, we wish to emphasize our active participation in the International Monitoring System, which is the very backbone of the CTBT verification system. To that end, Chile will contribute a network of six stations on its continental territory and on Easter and Juan Fernandez Islands, which will permit systematic monitoring in the vast Pacific-Antarctic region along our coastline.

We also hope that the number of ratifications of the Treaty will not be affected by the continued testing that raises questions about States' commitment to ending the qualitative proliferation of nuclear weapons. We therefore feel that it is indispensable that States signatories of the CTBT firmly commit themselves to act in keeping with the objectives of the Treaty, now and throughout the period preceding its entry into force.

Furthermore, another important challenge before us is the onset of negotiations to adopt a convention banning the production of fissile material — a cut-off convention. We therefore regret that, despite the decision taken by the Conference on Disarmament in 1995, no relevant work has yet been done.

Our country is committed to the Conference on Disarmament. That is why we believe it important to achieve consensus on a mechanism that will allow it to promote discussion on nuclear disarmament. In this respect, we recall that the International Court of Justice reaffirmed the obligation to begin and conclude negotiations leading to comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

In this context, Chile believes that efforts to link nuclear disarmament negotiations to a programme of action with phased results represent the wrong path. On the contrary, we believe that, in the context of such discussions, positions calling for the establishment of conditions between the distinct elements of nuclear disarmament will only delay global disarmament.

Moreover, although we recognize the importance of bilateral efforts for nuclear disarmament, we cannot downplay the fundamental role that the United Nations attaches to multilateral negotiations in this regard. The appropriate forum for that is certainly the Conference on Disarmament. A reactivation of that body is essential if we are to avoid the unfortunate situation that has paralysed it this year and to register progress in the various areas of the international disarmament agenda. This can be achieved with the goodwill and flexibility of all sectors.

In view of the concern regarding the risk of the proliferation of nuclear arms on the Korean peninsula, we welcome the recent progress in the context of the 1994 Framework Agreement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States of America. Chile is part of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). We were present in that capacity at the ceremony held on 19 August last to commemorate the beginning of work on two light-water nuclear reactors in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We would like to take this opportunity to express our willingness to continue to support the activities of KEDO aimed at consolidating peace and security in the region.

The Decision adopted in 1995 on strengthening the review process for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was put to the test for the first time in April this year. Chile participated in that first session of the Preparatory Committee, and welcomes the progress that has been made in an exercise which is without doubt different from the procedural character of all the previous preparatory work for NPT Review Conferences.

The Chemical Weapons Convention came into effect this year and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons began its work. Our country is committed to the Convention and its Organization. Chile has adapted its internal legislation accordingly, and has established a national authority in order to comply with the provisions of the Convention.

We also wish to emphasize that making the Convention universal is a priority for our country. Accordingly, we appeal to the Russian Federation — a country which has one of the largest chemical arsenals — to ratify this instrument, which has been designed and has come into being as a tool for disarmament, not merely non-proliferation.

Our country is a full party to the Biological Weapons Convention, and is actively participating in the amendment process to improve it by including a verification regime.

With regard to anti-personnel landmines, Chile has neither produced nor exported such devices in over 10 years. In the context of our disarmament and international security policy, Chile co-sponsored General Assembly

resolution 51/45, which called upon the international community to negotiate a convention to ban these devices.

Last August, President Frei, in the significant political framework of the launching of the *National Defence Book*, announced our country's full participation in the Ottawa process. The timing was of particular importance, as the *Book* is itself a tool for confidence-building and illustrates the transparency with which Chile deals with and makes public its security policy.

Consequently, Chile acted as a negotiator at the Oslo Diplomatic Conference, which adopted the text of a convention prohibiting the use, development, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, which it will sign in Ottawa next December. We will join in sponsoring a draft resolution calling on all States to sign and become parties to this Convention. We believe that the effective and global elimination of anti-personnel landmines will be achieved only when the major producers and exporters of these weapons have a practical and concrete reason to achieve the objective of their full elimination. Chile will therefore continue to pursue that objective in all the appropriate forums, including the Conference on Disarmament.

As I have already indicated, the publication this year of our *National Defence Book* coincided with a series of events that have placed policy on this matter among the public policies of greatest interest. Its publication has reaffirmed the fact that transparency policies in the region must be comprehensive and not partial. They should be developed so as to promote, not weaken, confidence.

Defence does not have the same, singular *raison d'être* for all States, as can be seen in the differing policies. This is why we believe — in our commitment to the spirit of transparency adopted in the framework of the 1995 Santiago conference of the Organization of American States on mutual confidence-building measures — that we must make progress in identifying the various aspects of the defence of each country of the region.

We are particularly concerned about the commercialization at the global level of the transportation of dangerous material. We attach particular importance to the adoption of measures to regulate the international maritime transport of radioactive wastes and spent nuclear fuel on the basis of the highest international security standards. Our concern is based on the risks that these shipments pose to the health of the inhabitants and the marine environment of the coastal regions where such shipping takes place.

We therefore emphasize the need for the competent international bodies to strengthen control of the transport of nuclear waste and spent nuclear fuels. They should, among other things, consider guarantees on non-contamination of the marine environment; the exchange of information about selected routes; the obligation to communicate contingency plans to coastal States in case of accidents in international maritime transportation; and a commitment to recover radioactive wastes in the event of accidents involving the ships which transport them, as well as to pay indemnities for injuries or damage. We are sure that any progress we can make in this area will be mutually beneficial to the coastal States and the States involved in the transport of these materials.

Our country believes that it is necessary to consolidate the objectives of the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, and we therefore call upon all States, particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to continue to move forward along the path indicated by Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok. In this context, we would like to emphasize that Latin America and the Caribbean have commemorated the first 30 years of the existence of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone in the world.

Chile, as a State party to the Antarctic and Tlatelolco Treaties, will co-sponsor and support the draft resolution on nuclear-weapon-free zones in the southern hemisphere and adjacent areas.

Mr. Afeto (Togo) (*interpretation from French*): I would first like to extend to you, Sir, the sincere congratulations of the delegation of Togo, not only on your election to chair our Committee, but also on the skilful way in which you are discharging your duties. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Alyaksandr Sychou, Permanent Representative of Belarus, who successfully guided our work during the fifty-first session, and to congratulate the other members of the Bureau and the Secretary of our Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-chung, and all his associates.

We once again have a rendezvous with history, as the opportunity is given to the First Committee to take stock of the actions of the international community and review developments in disarmament and international security.

Among the positive results achieved, my delegation welcomed with satisfaction the recent entry into force of the SALT I agreements; the signing of the SALT II agreements by the parties involved; the recent signing of the treaties of Bangkok and Pelindaba, which made South-East Asia and Africa respectively into nuclear-weapon-free zones; the unlimited extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; and the entry into force last April of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

All of these positive steps attest once again to the international community's steadily growing interest in disarmament issues, in particular in nuclear disarmament and in regulating other types of weapons of mass destruction.

Twelve months ago the International Court of Justice, responding to a request by the General Assembly regarding the legality of the use of nuclear weapons, deemed it relevant to draw the attention of the international community to its obligation

> "to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

On the basis of this advisory opinion, at its fifty-first session the General Assembly urged the nuclear-weapon States and the Conference on Disarmament to commence as soon as possible, within a special committee, negotiations leading to a convention on a total ban on the use of nuclear weapons.

In that context, my delegation regrets that the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to create this special committee. We hope that the members of the Conference will do all in their power to overcome their differences and to extricate themselves from the present deadlock, in order to establish this committee as soon as possible. In addition to drawing up a convention on the elimination or complete destruction of nuclear weapons according to a strict timetable, the committee should also begin negotiations to adopt an international agreement banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. In so doing, the Conference on Disarmament, which is now subject to numerous criticisms, would reassure the international community of its credibility, its capacity for action and the seriousness with which it is taking up the questions that fall within its competence.

In the area of conventional disarmament, Togo most strongly condemns the use of certain conventional weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects, in particular anti-personnel landmines, which every day claim thousands of innocent victims throughout the world. It is therefore time for the international community to step up its efforts to put an end to the use of these inhuman weapons.

Togo, a State subject to the rule of law and a country of peace, a zealous champion of general and complete disarmament, welcomes the review and improvement of Protocol II of the 1980 Conventional Weapons Convention. We also and in particular welcome the positive conclusion of the Ottawa process, which began in 1996 and led to the adoption in Oslo of the text of a treaty dealing with the prohibition of the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction. The Government of Togo hopes that this treaty — which will be open for signature by States next December in Ottawa and then in New York — will be ratified and implemented as quickly as possible by all States that truly love peace and justice, in the interest of humanity and all peoples.

Unless our Governments and the international community take concerted and rigorous action to combat the anarchic proliferation of and illegal trafficking in small arms, internal conflicts and local conflicts and the acts of subversion and vandalism perpetrated with these weapons will continue to endanger security and undermine efforts to achieve the social-economic development of our States.

The delegation of Togo is among those that believe that to stem this scourge, which is fueling increasing criminality, the international community should adopt more concrete measures aimed at further strengthening the regional approach to disarmament and at building up confidence among the States of a given region by steadily calling on the technical capacities of United Nations regional centres. This recommendation is all the more important because these centres constitute genuine mechanisms for regional disarmament, having been established at the initiative of this same First Committee with the mandate to assist States in the creation and implementation of confidence-building measures and the limitation and control of arms, on the basis of increased political stability.

The item concerning the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa is not on the agenda of the present session, and therefore there is no need for a lengthy discussion of it at this stage of our work. However, since the question is an important one, allow me to inform the representatives that under General Assembly resolution 51/46 E, and following the relevant decision adopted last June by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at Harare a mission of two consultants, initiated by the Secretary-General of the OAU, went to Togo and to several other African countries in August and September 1997 to explore, with the competent authorities of these countries, ways and means of revitalizing the Centre and strengthening its work.

While awaiting the publication of the consultants' report, my delegation would like to reaffirm, on behalf of the Government of Togo, that, in order to have the desired effect, any effort to revitalize the Centre must take into account the need to appoint at the head of the institution a Director with the necessary professional qualities. In the view of the authorities of my country, the immediate appointment of a Director of high rank and who is well-known internationally could give the Centre a new impetus and facilitate efforts to seek and mobilize funds to provide adequate financing for the activities anticipated in its programme.

In any case, the delegation of Togo welcomes the interest that the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and the Director of the United Nations Centre for Disarmament Affairs are attaching to the implementation of resolution 51/46 E. We take advantage of this opportunity to appeal once again to all States, as well as to interested foundations, to make voluntary contributions to the special Trust Fund set up in the Secretariat for the Regional Centre for Africa in Lomé.

As host country, Togo — aware of the grounds for and the importance of the role that this Centre must play with regard to disarmament and the maintenance and consolidation of peace in Africa — renews its commitment to step up its activities. Togo hopes that in the future, given adequate human and financial resources, the Centre's field of competence will expand to new areas, in particular preventive diplomacy, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the advancement of development and human rights, as well as the maintaining, for the African region, of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, paying particular attention to small arms.

In their effort to define security, many, identifying it with peace, have described it as the absence of war, while others define it as a situation without danger or risk of physical or material aggression or of deterioration.

These definitions are correct, but only partial. The delegation of Togo shares the belief of numerous other speakers that the security of a State, an individual or a people is a multidimensional phenomenon, which has both military and non-military aspects, the latter being moral, social and economic. With regard to the latter aspects, the genuine enemies of peace and development are, in particular, hunger, illness, unemployment, illiteracy, marginalization, poverty and social exclusion. These are all evils that, like the armed conflicts of which they are often the cause, endanger the security of our States and peoples and jeopardize development efforts.

The Government of Togo therefore urges the international community, which fortunately has the means to do so, to commit itself unconditionally and wholeheartedly to an energetic campaign against these scourges, on the basis of a new type of partnership to eliminate suffering and poverty. This is a necessary prerequisite for the establishment in our societies and our respective States of a genuine climate of peace and security through the better allocation and use of the considerable peace dividends.

These are some of my delegation's many concerns. We hope that all of the points raised will be taken into account in determining the mandate and the role of the new Department for Disarmament and Arms Regulation, whose creation was proposed by the Secretary-General within the framework of the ongoing reform process.

The delegation of Togo therefore hopes that the new Department, while giving priority to nuclear, chemical and biological disarmament, will include in its organizational chart a division dealing with the non-military aspects of security.

The Chairman: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to appeal to delegations to decrease the noise level at the back of the room. I think it disturbs the speakers, and we should have respect for one another in that way.

Mr. Amar (Morocco) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me first of all to extend to you, Sir, on behalf of the delegation of Morocco, our most sincere congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee.

We should like to assure you of the full cooperation and support of my country's delegation.

Significant progress was made last year in the area of arms control and disarmament through the conclusion of multilateral treaties within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. Treaties dealing with a vast range of weapons of mass destruction were negotiated, extended, strengthened, and entered into force.

The new institutionalized review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was initiated; the Treaty on a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was concluded; the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force and was ratified by 100 Member States; and the parties to the Biological Weapons Convention agreed to step up their efforts to negotiate verification provisions. In addition, new bodies were created in order better to implement the major provisions contained in those international treaties. Morocco welcomes this development.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), headquartered at The Hague, has begun its work, and the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT, based in Vienna, has taken its first steps.

However, the various arrangements concerning nuclear-weapon-free zones should be seriously consolidated, in particular in regions of tension such as the Middle East.

Morocco, which is gravely concerned by the serious consequences for peace and security of the presence in the Middle East region of nuclear activities that are not fully devoted to peaceful ends, calls on all parties directly involved to take practical and appropriate measures, as necessary, to follow up the proposal to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone that is mutually and effectively verifiable throughout the region.

Morocco's stand has always been based on the conviction that peace cannot last in a region or achieve its objectives without equitable arrangements guaranteeing the protection of the shared interests of all the parties in the Middle East. Hence its profound conviction that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would do much to serve the cause of peace and international security.

It is important to emphasize here that today, all of the States of the region except Israel have become parties to the NPT, and that the resolution adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference called upon all States of the Middle East that have not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to make progress towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Mr. Verdier (Argentina), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

It should be noted also that Israel, the only country in the region to possess a nuclear arsenal, is still refusing to place all of its nuclear activities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT and to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards represents an insurmountable obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and has prompted other States of the region to take a similar position on both the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, given that, in the area of weapons of mass destruction, security is indivisible.

It is the duty of the international community to take the necessary steps to encourage Israel to accede to the NPT, to place all of its facilities under IAEA safeguards and, pending the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone, not to develop, produce, test or otherwise acquire or permit the stationing on its territory, or territories under its control, of nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices.

Israel must also reject ambiguity in its nuclear policy. Such a move could enhance confidence in the region at a time when the peace process is entering a very dangerous stage, for which responsibility fully devolves on the Israeli authorities.

Turning to the question of anti-personnel landmines, the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco would like to reiterate the continuing commitment of Morocco to general and complete disarmament — an important element in its diplomatic activities. Furthermore, my country fully adheres to the humanitarian principles and objectives that underlie the Ottawa process. This has been evidenced, *inter alia*, by our co-sponsorship of resolution 51/45 S on anti-personnel landmines, adopted at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Morocco welcomes the fact that a large number of countries have agreed to sign the Convention next December in Ottawa. However, the security situation in

Morocco's southern provinces at that time will determine the possibility of its signing the Convention.

The Mediterranean region was in the past an area for confrontation and the exercise of hegemony. Today, the goal remains to formulate for this part of the world a policy that would lead to more balanced relations and a process of increased solidarity.

I need hardly recall that the Mediterranean area is now experiencing widening development gaps and uneven demographic growth, and that social needs are greater in the south than in the north. For the people in the region and in particular those of the south, these imbalances represent a constant source of uncertainty, tension and instability.

The desire for peace, security, harmony, development and understanding in the Mediterranean area require a genuine and collective awareness and the development of joint and large-scale action. Morocco has consistently called for an integrated, comprehensive approach to questions of peace, security and development in this area of the world.

The Secretary-General, in the section of his report on reform that deals with disarmament, reiterates once again the critical role that the United Nations should play in safeguarding, maintaining and promoting international peace and security.

In this connection, Morocco welcomes the Secretary-General's proposal to reconstitute the Centre for Disarmament Affairs into the Department for Disarmament and Arms Regulation. The Department should spare no effort to achieve optimum coordination of work between the First Committee, the Commission on Disarmament and the Conference on Disarmament in order to implement those efforts that can in fact implement general and complete disarmament.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Allow me at the outset to convey my congratulations to Ambassador Nkgowe on his election as Chairman of the First Committee. I would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election. The delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is confident that with his rich experience and skill, Ambassador Nkgowe will lead the deliberations of the Committee to a successful conclusion, to which end my delegation pledges its full support and cooperation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to his predecessor, Ambassador Sychou of Belarus, and to express my delegation's deep appreciation for his skilful guidance of our Committee's work during its previous session.

The world situation continues to undergo deep and complex changes. Nuclear weapons still pose the greatest danger to mankind, and their elimination remains a matter of the highest priority. In their communiqué issued here in New York on 25 September 1997, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Heads of Delegations of the Non-Aligned Movement, in line with the unanimous 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, called on the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified framework of time, including a nuclear-weapons convention. They also insisted on the need to conclude a universal and legally binding multilateral agreement committing all States to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. To our regret, some nuclear-weapon States have adopted a negative attitude in this context, which has not allowed the Conference on Disarmament to launch these long-awaited negotiations.

Pending the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, it is our view that the nuclear-weapon States should agree on a legally binding international instrument to provide unconditional assurances to all non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, and also on a legally binding international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. These are essential conditions under which all humankind can feel safe and be protected from nuclear annihilation.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is in favour of the strengthening of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. In this regard, given the importance of biotechnology for economic development, any verification regime of the Biological Weapons Convention should, in our view, take into account the security and economic interests of developing countries parties to the Convention.

Two years have passed since the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Nevertheless, our work for nuclear disarmament is far from over. We call upon the Preparatory Commission for the year 2000 Review Conference of the NPT to engage immediately in substantive work for the full and sincere

implementation of obligations under the Treaty and of the commitments set out in the 1995 principles and objectives. In this connection, we emphasize that all States, particularly the nuclear-weapon States, should fulfil their promises, especially those related to article VI of the NPT.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is pleased to note the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. With a view to its universality, it is our sincere hope that all States, including the declared possessors of chemical weapons, will ratify it at the earliest possible date. Here, we would like to underline the urgent need to resolve all remaining issues in the framework of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in order to pave the way for the effective, full and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention.

The illicit transfer, the proliferation and the accumulation of small arms and light weapons constitute a threat to the population and to national and regional security. States should adopt necessary administrative and legislative measures to deal effectively with this problem. In this regard, we salute the Disarmament Commission's adoption in 1996 of guidelines for international arms transfers in the context of General Assembly resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991.

The problem of anti-personnel landmines is another issue of serious concern to the international community. We take note of various moratoriums and other restrictions already declared by States on anti-personnel landmines and welcome the growing consensus against the indiscriminate use and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. On this note, we are of the view that any negotiation or agreement to ban landmines should take into account the legitimate national security concerns of States as well as their legitimate right to use appropriate measures for self-defence.

International peace and security appear to be further assured and strengthened as treaties on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones are adopted by many States of various regions. These include the Treaty of Bangkok for South-East Asia, the Treaty of Pelindaba for Africa, the Antarctic Treaty for Antarctica, the Treaty of Rarotonga for the South Pacific and the Treaty of Tlatelolco for Latin America and the Caribbean. In our opinion, the strong aspirations of the peoples of those regions to be free from the nuclear threat and from atomic explosions deserve the full support of the international community.

While examining issues of peace and disarmament, we should recognize the role played by the United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament. They continue to play a significant role in promoting arms control and building confidence and trust among the countries of their respective regions. In this respect, my delegation fully supports the initiatives, programmes and activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, known as the Kathmandu process. Necessary efforts should be made to promote it.

International arms control and disarmament are closely related to international peace and security. Mindful of the complexity of this issue, the Lao People's Democratic Republic will continue to cooperate with all countries and will contribute positively to the promotion of the international disarmament process, so as to ensure peace, stability and cooperation in our world of the next century.

Mr. Kumar (Singapore): I would like to congratulate the Chairman and the Bureau on their election. My delegation looks forward to working closely with them in tackling the work at hand.

The end of the cold war was seen to have removed the justification for the continued build-up of nuclear and conventional weapons. Specifically, hopes were raised that the pace of nuclear disarmament could now be speeded up.

There has been undeniable progress on nuclear disarmament in the post-cold war era. In the 1996-1997 period alone, we have seen the beginning of the preparatory process for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference in the year 2000, the establishment of the Technical Secretariat of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, and the ongoing START II between the two leading nuclear-weapon States.

However, there has also been disappointment over the slow pace and direction of post-cold war disarmament. Numerous intraregional conflicts have broken out where death and destruction have been caused by conventional weapons. This has led to demands from certain quarters for more checks and controls on the production, sale and transfer of these weapons. In turn, demands for greater controls on small arms and conventional weapons have been construed as an attempt by those with vested interests to divert attention from nuclear disarmament and to prevent developing countries from strengthening their defence-related capabilities.

Questions are also being raised about the effectiveness of the Conference on Disarmament as the main negotiating forum for disarmament. Its doubters have assessed that a multilateral approach involving protracted negotiations is essentially problematic. In the ongoing general debate of this Committee, a number of our colleagues have voiced their unhappiness over the lack of progress in the Conference on Disarmament this year. Others have even warned about its possible loss of credibility and descent into irrelevance.

What lessons are we to draw from the differing perceptions with regard to the agenda and approach which disarmament should follow in the post-cold-war era? What does the slow pace of disarmament tell us?

As has been constantly emphasized, disarmament is a process. However, it is not just a simple process involving the mere banning or elimination of certain categories of weapons. Disarmament in any category requires the firm commitment and support of producers, distributors and users. Given that certain weapons continue to play an indispensable role in protecting the national interests of their users, the required commitment is not easily attainable. Disarmament is not a process that can be clinically insulated from the overall political and security context in which it inevitably occurs.

Please allow me to explain my position with an example. The progress achieved in bringing about a global ban on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel landmines has been lauded as one of the brightest successes in a relatively bleak year for disarmament. Following the agreement reached within three weeks in Oslo last month, more than 100 countries are now expected to support the Treaty when it is opened for signature in Ottawa in December this year.

However, even in the blinding light of this "success", there remain members of our international community who, while welcoming the move to ban anti-personnel landmines, are unable at this time to join the global ban. In 1994, it was in the United Nations General Assembly that United States President Clinton called for a ban on anti-personnel landmines. However, the United States was subsequently unable to join the Oslo Conference in supporting the proposed terms of the Treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. The reason advanced was that such support would have compromised the continuing need of the United States to rely on anti-personnel landmines to defend South Korea. Moreover, President Clinton also pointed out that supporting the international ban on anti-personnel landmines in its present form would have put United States troops at risk.

Clearly, the United States could not support the global ban on anti-personnel landmines under the proposed terms, not because of its unwillingness or lack of sympathy towards this goal, but because the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and its own national interests imposed the continued need to rely on this weapon. This is quite understandable.

Singapore's position on anti-personnel landmines has been active and open. My country supports, and will continue to support, all initiatives against the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines, especially when they are directed at innocent civilians. To this end, Singapore has declared a two-year moratorium on the export of anti-personnel landmines which have no self-destruct or self-neutralizing mechanism. At the same time, like several other countries, Singapore firmly believes that the legitimate security concerns and right to self-defence of any State cannot be disregarded. Therefore, my country is of the view that a blanket ban on the use of all types of anti-personnel landmines might be counter-productive, especially if such a move might possibly compromise the security of its users.

A number of questions can also be raised with regard to the overall utility and viability of a global ban on anti-personnel landmines at this time. Would a blanket ban lead to any corresponding improvement in the international community's ability to control indiscriminate usage? A sophisticated level of research and development has allowed technologically advanced countries to move away from their use of anti-personnel landmines without compromising security. Could and would such relevant technology be made available to less developed States to help them reduce their dependence on anti-personnel landmines? Have we worked out how technical and material assistance can be made available to countries that desperately need it for the monumental task of demining? These are only some of the questions which have to be adequately addressed before the actual utility and viability of a blanket ban on anti-personnel landmines can be ascertained. Without considering such questions carefully, and by opting for a blanket ban, I am afraid we could be setting the stage for the triumph of form over substance.

Let me stress that I am not attempting to belittle the laudable efforts of those working tirelessly to eliminate the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. Their excellent contributions, along with those who risk their

lives on a daily basis in demining activities, deserve our praise and continued support. However, the anti-personnel landmines issue demonstrates that forward movement on disarmament can only be possible in the overall context of an enhanced level of international security. Substantial progress on disarmament would be impossible in an environment where States have no choice but to continue their reliance on destructive weapons to protect their security and national interests. The creation of a conducive international environment devoid of mutual suspicion cannot be attained overnight. That being so, the painful truth is that no time limit can be placed on disarmament.

Singapore's experience has given us cause for cautious optimism with regard to the overall prospects for further disarmament. During the cold war years, member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had sought to create a South-East Asia nuclear-weapon-free zone. The main motivation had been the need to prevent the region from becoming entangled in superpower conflicts. The cold war-based nuclear-weapon-free zone envisaged by ASEAN had been defensive, exclusionary and reactive in outlook. Negotiations between the ASEAN member countries on the terms of the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty were a long and protracted process. However, this laborious process ultimately proved to be useful in providing these countries with a better understanding and appreciation of each other's interests and needs.

The Bangkok Treaty establishing the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, which entered into force on 27 March 1997, is in sharp contrast to the treaty originally envisaged during the cold war years. I am pleased to announce that today's Zone is open, inclusionary and forward-looking. This positive trend is not confined to South-East Asia alone. The Treaties of Pelindaba, Rarotonga and Tlatelolco, the initiative to consolidate a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and the proposal for a nuclear-weapon-free Central Asia demonstrate that there is an evolving international consensus on the need to work patiently towards nuclear disarmament. It is our hope that the nuclear- weapon States will also recognize this positive international trend and lend their support to it.

The international community appears eager to seize the opportunity to bring about global disarmament. However, we must be realistic and recognize that the attainment of this objective might require a careful and pragmatic approach, similar to that required for clearing a minefield. If we cannot move as speedily as we would like towards disarmament, let us at least help one another in inching forward together, for some progress is still better than no progress or regression.

Mr. Berrocal Soto (Costa Rica): It is an honour for me to address the First Committee to express the views of Costa Rica on disarmament.

At the outset, my delegation would like to congratulate Ambassador Mothusi Nkgowe of Botswana on his election to the chairmanship of this Committee, and in particular to assure him and the other members of the Bureau of the full cooperation of my delegation in our work in the Committee. I should also like to pay tribute to Ambassador Alyaksandr Sychou, Permanent Representative of Belarus, for his great work as Chairman of the First Committee at the last session.

There is an urgent need for humankind to achieve total disarmament, but no kind of disarmament is as urgent as nuclear disarmament, as nuclear weapons threaten the very existence of all forms of life on our planet. That is why, as has often been said here, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament. Costa Rica supports the work on this important instrument by the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference, which we hope will enable us to draw closer to an indefinite extension of that Treaty.

One of the most valuable tools in the struggle for nuclear disarmament is also, without doubt, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has demonstrated its competence in international verification and control. In this context, we should like to emphasize the role that it has played in countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons. In the Security Council, Costa Rica, in its present capacity as a non-permanent member, has given its full support to the reports of the Agency, and will continue to do so. The Agency must be given greater means and further support for its valuable work, as an essential instrument of the United Nations system.

Reinforcing the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was opened for signature last year. When it enters into force this, too, will be a fundamental mainstay for achieving nuclear disarmament. Costa Rica welcomes the start of work in the Preparatory Commission of the CTBT Organization. My country is currently in the process of legislating to ratify this important Treaty; it requires 44 ratifications before it enters into force.

In order to ensure that we continue along the road to nuclear disarmament, we must also implement article VI of the NPT and begin negotiations on the prohibition of fissile material for nuclear weapons — the cut-off treaty. In this context, work must begin as quickly as possible and without major delay in the Ad Hoc Committee with responsibility for bringing those negotiations to a conclusion.

Costa Rica, together with its brother countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, is this year celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the creation by the Treaty of Tlatelolco of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America. This celebration fills us with great pride, as ours was the world's first such zone, and because it inspired the creation of similar zones in other parts of the planet.

The creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones through the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Rarotonga and Bangkok provides a guarantee for the future of humankind and an encouragement to other areas of the planet that deserve similar treaties. The new nuclear-weapon-free zones, like those already in existence, should be based upon total transparency on the part of the States parties and on their adherence to the relevant international legal instruments. Costa Rica will give its firm support to the draft resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere. We hope that agreement can soon be reached that will also enable Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

As long as they exist, nuclear weapons pose the most serious threat to human life and, therefore, ideally, from a moral and legal point of view they should disappear entirely. Costa Rica supports the initiatives aimed at the elimination of nuclear weapons, such as the model convention on the prohibition of nuclear weapons prepared by the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, which we consider to be very appropriate.

Finally, on this subject, I should like to reiterate that my country believes that the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* implies a legal obligation to prohibit the use of such weapons, and, based on this understanding, we will support the draft resolution to be submitted to the First Committee. We believe that this Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice is essential for the future of the United Nations.

The illegal traffic in conventional weapons is on a par with the great threat to the existence of humankind posed by nuclear weapons. The great availability of, accessibility to and traffic in conventional weapons is exacerbating conflicts that would otherwise not be so serious. The desire to profit from these weapons leads those who traffic in them to feed the rivalries and differences between the parties to conflicts, with the result that they require more weapons, thereby producing greater profits for the producers and traffickers. The responsibility for this traffic in death falls equally on the parties to the conflicts and the arms suppliers.

To this serious problem of arms trafficking others can be added, such as the traffic in drugs and narcotics, organized crime and the hiring of mercenaries, which further fan the flames of war and increase the suffering of peoples, especially in developing countries.

Costa Rica therefore believes it is essential to create a code of conduct for the international transfer of weapons, as proposed by Mr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, the former President of my country, together with other winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. Costa Rica will support every initiative on this important matter, just as we support the great efforts represented by the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, which are leading in the same direction.

The need to eliminate anti-personnel landmines deserves special mention. My country welcomes the adoption in Oslo of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My country will support the ongoing effort, in Ottawa and in other forums, to consolidate endeavours leading to the total elimination of these arms, and calls on all those States that still have reservations to join in the worldwide demand for the elimination of anti-personnel landmines. We hope that Latin America will become the first zone to be free from anti-personnel landmines, just as it was the first nuclear-weapon-free zone. In this lofty aspiration, Costa Rica is fully in accord with the efforts of the Rio Group.

Biological weapons are among the most serious threats to humankind, because their impact is unpredictable and they are cheap to produce. Biological weapons are even more dangerous at a time of rapidly developing biological engineering, when these weapons of mass destruction can find a place in many arsenals. In themselves such weapons threaten an imbalance in nature, and many of the biological agents that can be used as weapons are capable of frustrating all the efforts made in previous decades to eradicate diseases that are highly contagious and extremely

dangerous to human health worldwide. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention must therefore be strengthened.

Chemical weapons are also to be found among the arsenals of weapons of mass destruction; they are easy to produce and their cost is low. These weapons must also be eliminated.

We therefore welcome the entry into force of the Paris Convention banning chemical weapons and the fact that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has begun its work. There, as in all disarmament issues, honesty and transparency on the part of Member States will make a reality of the provisions of international agreements and the efforts of technical investigation and inspection teams, such as the United Nations Special Commission. It must be emphasized that these bodies have been doing excellent work, which we shall continue to support in all United Nations forums.

My country feels that, despite all the work that remains to be done in disarmament matters, we can say that much progress has been made recently. These efforts must not diminish. The twenty-first century beckons with the prospect and hope of a more peaceful world, a world, we hope, that is disarmed and committed to the economic and social development of mankind. This, finally, will make the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations a reality.

Mr. Valev (Bulgaria): Allow me first to congratulate the Chairman on his election to the chairmanship of this important Committee and on the exemplary manner in which he is discharging the difficult task entrusted to him. The delegation of Bulgaria is confident that under his able and skilful guidance the Committee will achieve tangible results. Our congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau, as well as to the Secretary of the Committee.

The delegation of Bulgaria associated itself with the statement made last week by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. In my intervention today I would like to emphasize certain issues of particular interest to my country.

Bulgaria attaches primary importance to regional security, stability and cooperation in South-Eastern Europe, based on the promotion of European standards of international conduct, and as a part of our accelerated integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. In July last year, at the Sofia Meeting of Foreign Ministers of South-Eastern Europe, a comprehensive process of multilateral cooperation between countries of the region was launched, receiving the support and approval of the international community. The participating States reached agreements concerning their future actions in various fields of regional cooperation, such as political cooperation; stability and development of good-neighbourly relations; economic cooperation in fields of mutual interest; joint actions for environmental protection; promotion of humanitarian, social and cultural cooperation; cooperation in law enforcement, justice and combating organized crime, terrorism, drugs and arms trafficking. They reaffirmed their commitment and willingness to continue and enhance the process. This created favourable conditions for holding a second ministerial meeting in June this year in Thessaloniki, Greece, which adopted a number of concrete steps and activities in regard to the above-mentioned main areas.

We firmly believe that in order to achieve greater stability and security in South-Eastern Europe this regional cooperation should be complemented by integrating eligible countries of the region into the transatlantic community. At the same time, we see the further consolidation of peace and stability in our part of the continent as an important precondition for earlier and successful integration. In this context, Bulgaria considers the decisions reached at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Madrid as a historic opening of the Alliance to the new democracies, including those of our region. And I should underline that, for Bulgaria, accession to NATO is a matter of immediate national interest and strategic priority, and not an issue of the politics of the day.

With a view to intensifying the interaction between NATO members and partner countries from our region, Bulgaria has advanced ideas for enhanced cooperation within the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council on security issues in South-Eastern Europe and the Black Sea area. This and other relevant proposals were discussed at the meeting of the Ministers of Defence of South-Eastern European Partnership for Peace participating States, regional NATO members Greece and Turkey, and NATO members Italy and the United States, held in Sofia earlier this month. The meeting adopted a joint statement, circulated as document A/C.1/52/4, which contains concrete follow-up measures and activities grouped under three headings: "Integration into Western Institutions", "Confidence and Security Building Measures" and "Regional Defence Cooperation". It was also agreed that such ministerial meetings should be held on a yearly basis.

Bulgaria regards these initiatives as a contribution to the common and mutually complementary efforts of its partners for strengthening regional peace and security.

This year brought about certain positive results in the field of arms control and disarmament. Above all, I would like to underline that the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force on 29 April, marked a new era in disarmament and in the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. The Republic of Bulgaria, as an active member of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, has taken the relevant national steps for implementation of this international agreement.

The adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) represents yet another major achievement. The programme of action agreed upon at the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review and Extension Conference in 1996, qualified the CTBT as an important immediate step towards nuclear disarmament. We consider the Treaty to be an effective tool to halt the vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons. Against this background, Bulgaria attaches great importance to the work of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT Organization that has started in Vienna. My country has at its disposal considerable expertise and equipment that can be used in the future CTBT verification system. In this regard, we reiterate our readiness to provide a Bulgarian seismic station for these purposes.

We are of the view that the nuclear test ban should be supplemented by other steps in the same direction. For my delegation a cut-off convention would be the next logical stage in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Bulgaria supports an early start of negotiations on this matter. The issues of negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space deserve adequate attention too. The future Conference on Disarmament agenda should be balanced and deal both with weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms.

We regard the possible spread of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery as one of the major concerns of the 1990s. Recent developments in different parts of the world make it clear that in the new political environment the dangers of, and the incentives for, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have increased rather than decreased. The existing regimes of multilateral treaties, such as the NPT, the CWC and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) provide for basic restrictive norms in this field. My Government supports any efforts to further strengthen these regimes. We also share the view that the peaceful economic activities of States should not be disturbed by any of these regimes.

The Government of Bulgaria applies arms and dual-use export controls in support of its commitment to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. We control unilaterally the items on the equipment and technology control list of the Missile Technology Control Regime and have declared our interest in becoming a member of the Regime.

In the area of the non-proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, we share the same goals and values as the States members of the Australia Group, and have a national system of export controls which incorporates the control lists of the Australia Group as to chemical precursors and chemical-weapons-related equipment as well as micro-organisms, toxins and biological-weapons-related equipment. For this reason, Bulgaria aspires for membership in the Australia Group.

In the last few years my country has paid special attention to the question of anti-personnel landmines. Bulgaria believes that if existing international humanitarian law were faithfully applied the current indiscriminate use of weapons, in particular anti-personnel mines, would not have occurred. We have therefore regarded the efforts to strengthen the legal regime of the 1980 Convention on certain conventional weapons, in particular its Protocol II, as being central to the overall strategy of the international community concerning anti-personnel landmines. The Bulgarian national approach to this issue has always contained some constraints, reflecting realistic doctrinal thinking on national security and defence. We have taken, of necessity, a somewhat cautious attitude to accepting measures which would impose excessive restrictions on the effectiveness of national defence.

We believe that the text of a new Convention that would ultimately ban all anti-personnel landmines, which was agreed at the Oslo Diplomatic Conference, could well serve as a basis for achieving a comprehensive and widely acceptable international agreement. We are confident that the Ottawa process can provide useful political momentum to the wider overall effort to ban anti-personnel landmines. At the same time, Bulgaria remains convinced that the Conference on Disarmament offers the most practical and effective forum for negotiating a global comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines covering most major producers and users.

Bulgaria has contributed to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms every year since its establishment. We see the strengthening of the Register as an appropriate step in setting up a working mechanism for ensuring transparency in the field of conventional armaments. Bulgaria favours the inclusion in the Register of data on military holdings and procurement through national production.

The Chairman returned to the Chair.

My country is among the initiators of the regional arms-control process and the elaboration of comprehensive confidence- and security-building measures which have contributed considerably to European security and stability. Bulgaria is fulfilling, in good faith, all its obligations and commitments arising from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the 1994 Vienna Document on security- and confidence-building measures, and stands committed to their goals and objectives. We welcome the entry into force of the CFE Flank agreement on 15 May this year, which represents a commitment of all States parties to strengthening regional stability.

Mr. Mujuthaba (Maldives): Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Maldives delegation, let me convey to you my sincere congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. We are confident that you will guide the work of this Committee wisely, and we pledge you our full support.

The favourite word in this building presently is "reform". It is very easy to say. However, to bring form to reform requires giving up old concepts, notions, attitudes and beliefs, of which the most classic is the belief that nuclear weapons can prevent war. Since the Second World War we have seen several wars fought, in some of which even nuclear-weapon States were directly involved. Mercifully, nuclear weapons were not used.

Another argument is that the cold war remained cold because of nuclear weapons. If this were true, why should we not destroy all these useless, potentially harmful, weapons now that the cold war is over? The cold-war adversaries say the cold war is dead. However, many keep testing nuclear devices and upgrading old arsenals and inventing new ones.

Those who have nuclear weapons know that when such weapons are used, the resulting casualties will not be confined to military men and women and installations. They also know that the fallout will affect not only generations of human beings to come but also most forms of fauna and flora. Today, we have a situation in the world in which a few States possess multi-billion dollar nuclear weapons, while many people live in abject poverty. This is unprecedented in the history of mankind. On the one hand, these man-made nuclear weapons can destroy the Earth several times over at the will of man. On the other hand, hundreds of millions of people live in poverty, and their lives and livelihood are at the mercy of nature. It is to this dreadful situation that the United Nations has to find a solution.

We hope to see a day when the money that goes to research into, and the development and production of, nuclear weapons is diverted to the improvement of socio-economic conditions and, most of all, to the eradication of poverty. But, sadly, not every Member of the United Nations is prepared to work to realize this dream.

The building up of conventional weapons and arms is a cause for alarm. The greater the build-up, the greater the risk of escalating localized conflicts. The United Nations should take steps to reduce the build-up of conventional weapons.

The Maldives has always supported international efforts to ban anti-personnel mines, as they can kill or maim innocent men, women and children long after the mines' effectiveness in military operations. In this regard, my delegation applauds the Ottawa process on banning anti-personnel mines. My country has never engaged in the production, use, transfer or stockpiling of anti-personnel mines, nor does it have any aspiration to do so. Therefore, we look forward to becoming a party to the treaty when it is ready for signature in December. We hope to see countries that have difficulties with the treaty modify their stand and be in a position to join the international community in signing it.

What can a small State such as the Maldives do to eliminate weapons of mass destruction in the world? How can we contribute to making the world a safer place for future generations? All we can do is to highlight the dangers of these weapons and the futility of wasting resources on their research and development and give moral support to States that are trying to eliminate them.

The only effective way to eliminate these weapons would be for the nuclear States to destroy the ones that they possess, and for the threshold States to give up their aspirations.

The Maldives is a party to many disarmament conventions. A few weeks ago we signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We participate in such conventions, but not because we are involved in any of the activities they ban. On the contrary, the Maldives has no stockpile of such weapons, nor has it any ambition for involvement in such activities. The Maldives participates in these conventions only as a manifestation of its unequivocal support for the cause of global peace.

The Maldives is one of the world's smallest nations in terms of land area, population and resource base. Countries like ours cannot spend money on military matters. Small countries are particularly vulnerable to external threats and spillover effects from neighbouring countries.

Although international peace and security is a concern to the entire international community, small States are limited in their ability to meet their security requirements. The United Nations thus remains the only guarantor of their security. So, as our President, Mr. Gayoom, said in his address to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, we want the United Nations to react to the threats the small States are frequently exposed to with the same urgency, commitment and effectiveness as it did in the Middle East in 1956 and 1967 and in Kuwait in 1991, and to accept the security and protection of small States as an integral part of international peace and security.

The Chairman: I now give the floor to Mr. Wolfgang Hoffman, Executive Secretary of the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) Organization.

Mr. Hoffman (Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization): It is good to be back in this room, where I see many colleagues and friendly faces. I should like to thank those delegations that have made many positive comments on our endeavours in Vienna with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

As the Committee will remember, on 10 September last year the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was endorsed by the General Assembly. It was then opened for signature on 24 September at the United Nations in New York.

The Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO was established as an international organization on 19 November 1996 at a meeting of States signatories to the Treaty held in this very conference room. On 3 March this year the Preparatory Commission appointed me as Executive Secretary of the Provisional Technical Secretariat.

I would like to offer the First Committee a brief overview of how far we have come during these past months in building up our Organization and preparing the Treaty's entry into force.

As an international organization financed by the States signatories, which now number 148, the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT consists of two organs: a plenary body composed of all the States signatories — also called the Preparatory Commission — and the Provisional Technical Secretariat (PTS).

Following the first session of the Preparatory Commission in New York and Geneva, the Provisional Technical Secretariat took up its work in Vienna on 17 March 1997. With the signing of the Host Country Agreement between the Preparatory Commission and the Republic of Austria on 18 March, the Preparatory Commission formally established its seat in that city.

One of our Organization's important mandates is to install a global verification regime foreseen in the Treaty, so that it is operational by the time of the Treaty's entry into force. The International Monitoring System, a worldwide network of 321 seismic, infrasound, hydroacoustic and radionuclide stations, will be built up progressively and run by the host countries in cooperation with the Provisional Technical Secretariat. The stations will transmit data to the International Data Centre to be established in Vienna. Procedures for on-site inspections and confidence-building measures will be developed.

To fulfil its mandate, which is to support the Preparatory Commission, the Provisional Technical Secretariat immediately started to build a nucleus of personnel in order to meet the needs of State signatories.

Initially, in the areas of personnel, finance, conference services, general services, legal services and external relations, a small staff was taken on to service the Preparatory Commission and its signatory States. Since last summer we have focused on staffing the Verification Divisions (International Monitoring System, International Data Centre and On-Site Inspection). The five Divisions of the Secretariat have now become operational. From the outset of its operations, the Provisional Technical Secretariat's administrative, legal and external staffs began

to develop cooperative structures with other international organizations at the Vienna International Centre, which have been contracted to carry out some routine operations for the Secretariat.

At present the Secretariat has just over 80 staff members, who were recruited in the most transparent way possible, and who represent about 40 different nationalities. Out of the 116 positions foreseen in the budget for 1997, we expect to have 110 filled by the end of the year. The rest of the personnel budget will be used to buy services from other Vienna-based organizations.

The Preparatory Commission has established three subsidiary bodies, which have been making proposals and recommendations for consideration and adoption by the Preparatory Commission at its plenary sessions: Working Group A on administrative and budgetary matters; Working Group B on verification issues; and the Advisory Group on financial, budgetary and associated administrative issues, consisting of independent experts.

The Commission's programme of work for this year calls for the survey of 55 sites for stations and the establishment or upgrading of 18 seismological stations and one hydroacoustic station. Draft International Monitoring System facility agreements have been forwarded by the Secretariat through official channels to the Foreign Ministers of the 40 countries identified by the Preparatory Commission for work in 1997. Where possible, the Secretariat has been meeting with delegations for consultations on these agreements.

The work programme for 1998 has been defined by both Working Groups in their respective areas. An appropriate budget has been developed in a collaborative process by States signatories, Working Groups A and B and the Provisional Technical Secretariat. It will be adopted at the fourth session of the Preparatory Commission in December this year.

In order to speed up commissioning and to comply with the work programme set out by Working Group B for 1997 and 1998, the PTS intends to take the following approach. In those sites where it is feasible and where the respective Governments agree, a tender for bids will be put out in parallel with the discussion and final signature of the country agreements with the States signatories. Proceeding in this manner will accelerate the completion of the 1997 programme, which in most cases represents the first phase of work to be continued under the 1998 budget. Several States signatories have already expressed an interest in jointly conducting with the PTS the site surveys programmed for 1997, and work is now proceeding to undertake the first site surveys in several countries. The PTS will conduct some of these site surveys in cooperation with the States signatories, at a cost that should always be comparable with that estimated by Working Group B.

Last May, at its second session, the Preparatory Commission approved a modern programme-budget structure consisting of projects, sub-programmes, programmes and major programmes. In the subsequent budget process, the Provisional Technical Secretariat defined the cost elements related to administration. Working Group A, which had been assigned the task of developing the budget structure, was also responsible for developing the non-verification-related major programmes, in consultation with the Provisional Technical Secretariat. Working Group B was responsible for the verification-related major programmes. The 1998 draft budget has seven major programmes, five of which are verification related. Working Group B proposed to the Preparatory Commission the following priorities for its work programme over the next several years, and these are quite obvious: the commissioning of the International Monitoring System (IMS); the establishment of the International Data Centre (IDC) in Vienna; communications infrastructure; on-site inspection development; and the evaluation of verification programmes.

I would now like to give some more detailed information on progress in our verification-related activities, which really constitute the core of our work.

Parallel progress in the many areas concerned was secured by the appointment of task leaders, who prepared papers for Working Group B. In this respect, my gratitude goes to those countries that were willing to take on these tasks and who helped us a great deal.

Regarding the progressive commissioning of the International Data Centre, and the design and development of a global communications infrastructure, significant progress has been made with the support of the technical experts from Working Group B and of the staff of the prototype International Data Centre in Arlington, Virginia.

Phase I of the progressive Commission plan for the International Data Centre is well under way. The plan calls for progress to be achieved in the area of communications and in four related areas: one, facility preparation; two, infrastructure development; three, software development and testing; and, four, staffing and training.

The Provisional Technical Secretariat is preparing the 1997 IDC training programme for the first 10 candidates, originating from 10 different States signatories, to start on 8 December 1997. Presently, the PTS is accepting applications from candidates for enrolment in the second training class that is to start around June 1998.

I turn now to the design and development of a global communications infrastructure. Progress has been made in the following areas: one, analysis of data collection requirements; two, assessment of the volumes of data and products required by States signatories; three, survey of the state of global communications capabilities; and, four, development of the global communications infrastructure procurement package. All of these activities are critically linked to the larger global communications infrastructure design, planning, procurement and implementation process. An informal workshop on global communications infrastructure matters was organized by France last July.

Let me now turn to the assessment of volumes of data and products required by States signatories. The PTS questionnaire sent to all States signatories in June for the purpose of defining the standard distribution volume and better understanding the needs of the States signatories has produced some preliminary conclusions. States expect to require, first, daily event bulletin reports; secondly, raw waveform data for approximately 5 to 10 events each day; and, thirdly, approximately one hour per day of interactive electronic access to the International Data Centre archives and World Wide Web facilities.

With regard to a survey of the state of global communications capabilities, the Secretariat has been communicating with several satellite telecommunication organizations on technologies available for data transfer, satellite systems in operation and regulatory and tariff experience.

At the same time, the Secretariat has been engaged in many complementary activities. In cooperation with other organizations based at the Vienna International Centre, and including interested delegations, the Provisional Technical Secretariat has been seeking to define areas for cooperation with Vienna-based organizations on joint and common services, with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the areas of personnel and finance, and with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the area of procurement. With the IAEA, we are also seeking areas of substantive cooperation. At the same time, the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO is working in conjunction with all other organizations based at the Vienna International Centre to benefit from their experience and to develop maximum synergies.

In addition, an on-site inspection workshop organized by the Provisional Technical Secretariat discussed the methodology for conducting inspections and phenomena associated with nuclear explosions and radiation measurement. Fifty-four experts from 18 States signatories participated in the workshop. A follow-up workshop on on-site inspection equipment and techniques for analysis and interpretation of obtained inspection data will be organized by the Provisional Technical Secretariat from 12 to 16 January next year. Workshops were also hosted by States signatories on various aspects of the verification regime, and others are foreseen. In December, training workshops on the International Monitoring System will be hosted by Argentina and South Africa for their respective regions.

An expert fax and e-mail network has been installed to facilitate direct contacts between experts and the Secretariat. Experts and delegations are receiving personal passwords to retrieve documents directly from the network. All Preparatory Commission documents, including the annexes, will also be accessible through our new website, which was launched on the first anniversary of the opening of the Treaty for signature.

Last but not least, we have been pursuing a very active public information policy. In numerous briefings for delegations — including those that are not yet State signatories — journalists, non-governmental organizations and students, we have explained the provisions and significance of the Treaty, which constitutes an important achievement to help worldwide non-proliferation efforts and to help halt the development of new nuclear weapons by imposing a global ban on nuclear explosions, thus constituting a step towards nuclear disarmament.

With 148 States signatories, the CTBT is rapidly approaching the status of a universal treaty. Additional countries have expressed their interest in the Treaty. Since the CTBT is one of the most economical and cheapest ways to make the world a safer place, I would like to invite all countries that are not yet States signatories to consider signing it. A number of countries that have not yet signed the Treaty have offered to place technical installations on their territories at the disposal of the Preparatory Commission. Thus, they will be participating as observers in the implementation of the Treaty.

Up to now, seven States signatories have ratified the CTBT and the ratification process seems to be well under way in numerous countries. I am aware that ratification can be a time-consuming process in national legislatures. Nevertheless, I would like to invite all States signatories that have not yet ratified the CTBT to enhance the ratification process in order to assure its entry into force in due time.

It seems prudent to state that the Preparatory Commission of the CTBT, as well as the Secretariat, have been working hard on the preparation of the entry into force of an important arms control agreement which, properly monitored and enforced, will contribute to ending the qualitative arms race and therefore encourage much deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals than have been achieved up to this moment.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee at this session. I am confident that, with your diplomatic skills and knowledge of international affairs, you will effectively guide the First Committee's deliberations to a successful conclusion. Let me also take this opportunity to extend my felicitations to other members of the Bureau.

I will start with nuclear disarmament. The end of the cold war provided the hope that the international community would seize the opportunity to achieve progress in different aspects of disarmament. The objectives were commonly viewed to be the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and the reduction of conventional weapons.

The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) on the basis of commitments stipulated in the documents of the Review and Extension Conference; the historic decision of the International Court of Justice on the commitment of nuclear-weapon States to undertake negotiations in good faith for nuclear disarmament; the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); General Assembly resolution 51/45 0 on nuclear disarmament; the programme for nuclear disarmament proposed by the Group of 21 of the Conference on Disarmament; the resolution of the European Union on the NPT; the model nuclear weapons convention prepared by the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy; and some initiatives of other non-governmental organizations have all demonstrated the firm determination of the international community to end the nightmare of nuclear war.

Despite such efforts, however, the nuclear-weapon States have insisted on maintaining and developing these weapons, thus paralysing the confidence-building activities of the Conference on Disarmament and other intergovernmental bodies dealing with the subject. While various studies from respectable independent sources have concluded that the adoption of a phased, scheduled programme for nuclear disarmament is foreseeable, there are some States that, unjustifiably, have insisted on the infeasibility of nuclear disarmament in the foreseeable future.

Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament made no progress on any of its agenda and was unable to establish any ad hoc committees in its 1997 session. Some nuclear-weapon States are still reluctant to conduct negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament. That is why the Conference finds itself in a stalemate. Furthermore, with the insistence of the nuclear Powers on limiting the scope of the CTBT to nuclear explosions, this Treaty has in practice lost its comprehensive character and has not prevented the further development of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the nuclear Powers, utilizing advanced technology, are able to further develop their nuclear stockpiles and produce new and more complex types of nuclear weapons through non-explosive tests. The controversy over vertical proliferation has been accentuated by the subcritical testing that has been conducted by one signatory State — an action which is clearly in contradiction to the spirit and objectives of the Treaty.

Despite such disappointing facts, however, we would like to remain optimistic and hopeful. It is hoped that the Conference on Disarmament, in the first part of its annual session in 1998, will establish two ad hoc committees: one on a comprehensive convention on the prohibition of fissile materials for nuclear-weapon purposes and the other on a comprehensive convention on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The possibility of one ad hoc committee on nuclear weapons, with a mandate to negotiate several nuclear-related items, could also be considered. A strong international consensus has been created for the initiation of such negotiations and we hope that the Conference on Disarmament will live up to these expectations.

While welcoming the establishment of the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization — despite the shortcomings of the CTBT, which cast a shadow over its true comprehensiveness — we consider the Treaty to be a step in the right direction, although limited, that should be

followed by additional steps towards the goal of nuclear disarmament.

The indefinite extension of the NPT and commitments undertaken by all Parties at the Review Conference were significant steps towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, the long-term validity of the NPT and its success depend greatly upon how well the Parties to the Treaty work together in the years ahead to fulfil the commitments undertaken during the 1995 Conference. The strengthened Preparatory Committee process should make substantive contributions, taking into consideration the 1995 decision on principles and objectives, in order to enable the Review Conference to evaluate the full realization and effective implementation of the provisions of the Treaty and to identify the areas in which further progress should be sought in future.

Iran notes with satisfaction that the first session of the Preparatory Committee recommended to the next session the allocation of specific time to be devoted to discussions on ways and means for the implementation of the Middle East resolution, negative security assurances and cut-off, and I hope that the 1998 meeting of the Preparatory Committee can make progress in these matters.

The application of double standards in the area of non-proliferation and the employment of non-transparent and exclusive export control mechanisms in the areas of nuclear, chemical and biological technology for peaceful uses are most destructive of international confidence and security. It is evident that any verification and control of transfer of these materials among State parties should be in accordance with the provisions of relevant treaties negotiated among all concerned. All State parties to the relevant treaties should be able to participate in such negotiations without exception.

The treaties in the above-mentioned areas contain specific mechanisms for ensuring compliance. Any question regarding compliance and actions by the international community in cases of violations of the specific provisions of such treaties should be addressed through the relevant treaty mechanisms and in accordance with the treaty provisions.

In the area of nuclear activities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the competent responsible body to verify compliance of the States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). States parties that have concern regarding the non-compliance of other States in regard to their safeguards agreements should direct such concerns, along with supporting evidence and information, to the Agency to consider, investigate, draw conclusions and decide on necessary actions in accordance with its mandate. Measures should be taken to ensure that the rights of all States parties under the provisions of the preamble and the articles of the Treaty are fully protected and that no State party is limited in the exercise of these rights based on allegations of non-compliance which are not verified by IAEA.

May I now turn to nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the establishment of zones free from weapons of mass destruction in various regions as a step towards the achievement of a world free of these weapons. In 1974 Iran suggested the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, a proposal which has since received the support of various sessions of the General Assembly. However, Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT and accept IAEA safeguards continues to be the obstacle to the realization of this common objective.

The realization of the goal of establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones in the southern hemisphere and other regions has indeed enhanced regional and global peace and security. The Islamic Republic of Iran firmly believes that nuclear Powers must respect international agreements establishing these zones and sign the relevant protocols and support the initiatives of NPT States parties to establish such zones, particularly in the Middle East. This requires the international community to exert pressure on Israel to accede to the NPT and accept IAEA safeguards, in line with Security Council Resolution 487 (1981).

I take this opportunity to express the satisfaction of my delegation at having the item on nuclear-weapon-free zones on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission. I hope that, with the cooperation of Member States, the Disarmament Commission will have a successful outcome on this item.

The entry into force of the CWC is undoubtedly the greatest achievement of the international community in the area of disarmament after the cold war. Iran, as the latest victim of these inhumane weapons, actively and wholeheartedly contributed to its negotiation, co-sponsored the relevant draft resolution at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly and was among the first signatories to this important treaty.

In our view, the effectiveness and universality of this Convention will depend to a large extent on the way in

which it is implemented, and in particular the degree to which the developed, as well as developing countries, comply with their obligations. Therefore, the implementation of the Convention will require the same degree of perseverance as did its negotiations.

The preparatory work at The Hague, which otherwise moved forward smoothly, was marred by difficulties in arriving at solutions on some significant and contentious issues. In fact, most questions which were resolved politically during the negotiations in Geneva faced contradictory interpretations and positions in The Hague.

The Convention has entered into force, and for the next conference of the States parties efforts need to be intensified to resolve pending issues, particularly on article XI, which is the concern of most developing countries.

The basic concept of the Convention from the outset has been that intricate and extensive means of verification would be coupled with provisions to ascertain the free trade in chemicals. The Australia Group and its activities, therefore, have been under constant focus. In fact, the conclusion of the Convention became possible at the final stage only when commitments were made within the text of the Convention, as well as through the formal statements of the Group, that restrictions on the transfer of equipment, technology and material not prohibited by the Convention would not be maintained among the States parties.

This issue needs to be resolved in a satisfactory manner for the Convention to have any chance of success. In order to facilitate the solution, we have proposed that an international mechanism under the Convention be established for export control arrangements to replace the Australia Group. This proposal should meet the support of every State within that Group which sincerely seeks to find a reasonable compromise.

The unabated race for the acquisition of conventional weapons not only wastes huge quantities of the limited resources of third world countries so desperately needed for development, but also aggravates an atmosphere of anxiety and mistrust. As a first step, transparency in the transfer of armaments can play an instrumental role in building confidence, arresting the arms race in various regions and enhancing regional and global peace and stability. This would be particularly so if such transparency curbed the actual sale and transfer of sophisticated, yet unnecessary, weapon systems to volatile regions, such as the Middle East. Other constructive and useful steps include devising realistic measures to ban anti-personnel landmines and control the acquisition and transfer of light arms to areas where such weaponry can exacerbate civil conflicts. However, in our collective efforts to achieve transparency or prohibit specific types of weapons, we must never lose sight of the ultimate objective in the area of conventional weapons: the reduction of all categories of weapons and the curbing of military expenditures worldwide.

According to the annual report *The Military Balance*, dated October 1997, the Middle East and North Africa import nearly 40 per cent of the arms sold in the world. While the Islamic Republic of Iran has submitted its return since the establishment of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, unfortunately the lowest rate of participation in the Register is recorded by the Middle East region. Despite this fact, the Group of Governmental Experts on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and transparency in armaments chose not to consider the serious question of such low participation.

As stated by our Foreign Minister during the general debate in the General Assembly,

> "it is self-evident that the lack of security in the Middle East is rooted in Israel's militarism and its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, which have thwarted all disarmament initiatives and mechanisms in the region." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 6th meeting, p. 25]

Some regional countries, motivated by their security concerns arising from Israeli nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, have been reluctant to sign or ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention, and do not even find it possible to participate in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. Yet unabated political and practical support for Israeli acquisition of weapons of mass destruction is being rendered by one State, or a few States. This in itself underlines the bitter reality that policies and practices of extra-regional Powers have led the region not to security or stability, but to further mistrust, tension and the arms race, providing lucrative markets for weapons manufacturers.

May I now turn to landmines. Iran is one of the heavily mined countries of the world. During eight years of imposed war, nearly 16 million landmines and unexploded submunitions were planted in more than 4 million hectares of Iranian territory that was temporarily occupied during different stages of the war.

The non-availability of maps of the minefields and lack of access to advanced equipment and technology have hindered our mine clearance efforts, so that casualties have continued among civilians as well as those involved in the clearing operations. We are participating in the Ottawa process as an observer. It was expected that the Ottawa process would result in the preparation of a comprehensive and balanced document that would address both security and humanitarian aspects of the problem, and would include provisions on financial support and the transfer of the necessary advanced technology to the affected countries to enable them to overcome this serious problem. Regrettably, the final Oslo text does not meet these concerns in a clear and concrete manner. We welcome the decision taken by the Conference on Disarmament during its 1997 session to appoint a special coordinator to seek the views of its members on the most appropriate arrangement to deal with the issue of anti-personnel landmines and on a possible mandate. We believe that the Conference should establish an ad hoc committee, with an appropriate mandate, to negotiate a ban on anti-personnel landmines.

We note with concern that the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament has yet to be convened, and that at its 1997 session the United Nations Disarmament Commission failed to agree on the agenda and date for the special session. We urge all parties concerned to show a spirit of cooperation and to try to reach an agreement with a view to convening this important session at the earliest possible time.

I shall now touch upon the Secretary-General's proposed reforms. While appreciating the Secretary-General's efforts to streamline and restructure the Organization to improve its functioning, I would like to make the following observations. In reviewing the disarmament machinery, we should be guided by the following three basic principles. First, we should build on our past achievements, especially the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Secondly, we should bear in mind that what prevented the international community from making substantial progress in the field of disarmament and related security issues during the cold war era was the lack of political will to negotiate, and not the disarmament machinery itself. Thirdly, we should be aware that in a world that is more diversified and less centralized, any risk of excessive centralization in dealing with reform matters must be avoided.

At a time when considerable attention is being paid to reviewing the disarmament machinery, my delegation is of the view that a review of the disarmament mechanisms established by the first special session of the General Assembly could be carried out by another special session of the Assembly, bearing in mind resolution 51/45 C and without prejudice to the institutional role of the different organs of the United Nations, as set forth in the United Nations Charter and General Assembly resolutions.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me first of all to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, as well as to the other members of the Bureau, on your election to head this important Committee. We know that under your leadership our work will be crowned with success. We should also like to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Mr. Alyaksandr Sychou, the Permanent Representative of Belarus, for his praiseworthy efforts as Chairman of the Committee at the last session.

During the year that has passed since the last session we have witnessed positive developments in the area of disarmament. These developments move us nearer to our goal of nuclear disarmament, and we hope that they will serve to strengthen the foundations for security on both the regional and international levels.

Thus, in the nuclear area, last year we welcomed the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It made an important contribution to the process of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament by emphasizing the need for a determined commitment on the part of all, and in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to a complete cessation of the arms race in all its aspects, to nuclear disarmament, and to the total and final elimination of all nuclear weapons. Today Tunisia, which signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in October 1996, welcomes the holding of the first session of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, last November and March, as well as the establishment of the secretariat of that Organization, opening the way to the preparation of the implementation stage of the Treaty.

We have also noted with satisfaction the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which will enable the elimination of an entire category of formidable weapons of mass destruction to be put into effect. Tunisia, which attaches great importance to this Convention, is among the group of countries that ratified it before its official entry into force on 29 April 1997. We believe that the Convention can only fully achieve its goals if it has universal adherence, and in particular the adherence of the major chemical-weapon-producing countries.

However, such progress should not make us forget that we have a long road ahead of us to achieve the objective of the complete and final elimination of nuclear weapons. This objective has been ardently sought for decades now by the community of nations, and in particular by the non-nuclear-weapon States. The end of the cold war has brought this goal closer to realization, and the impetus created by the new world environment in the 1990s provides a valuable opportunity to move forward with determination towards genuine nuclear disarmament. This would be in keeping with the numerous appeals of the General Assembly and in particular the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament; with the commitments made by the nuclear Powers within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its Article VI; and with the commitments those same Powers undertook during the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the NPT within the framework of the decision on "Principles and objectives for unclear non-proliferation and disarmament".

In this context, we emphasize the importance of pursuing determined efforts in the multilateral forums in particular in the Conference on Disarmament, to implement other substantive disarmament measures. In addition, it is important to conclude unilateral measures and bilateral arrangements and agreements, such as the START agreements between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, of which the last, START II, should be ratified and enter into force as soon as possible in order to open the way to the conclusion of a START III treaty and thus to allow new reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the two largest nuclear Powers.

Regional nuclear disarmament, on the one hand, is a critical element in the consolidation of efforts towards non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament at the international level, and, on the other, represents a significant contribution to the strengthening of the foundations of peace and security at the regional level.

Along these lines, my country has consistently supported efforts aimed at the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones. In Africa, Tunisia worked to achieve the creation of a denuclearized zone and was among the first countries to sign the Treaty of Pelindaba establishing such a zone on the continent. Moreover, Tunisia welcomes the conclusion of the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty and the fact that these two new denuclearized zones follow in the wake of the nuclear-weapon-free zones that already exist in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in the South Pacific. This promotes and consolidates progress towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons from the southern hemisphere of the planet. At the previous session, Tunisia had actively supported the draft resolution submitted by the delegation of Brazil on a nuclear-weapon-free Southern Hemisphere and adjacent areas. We will continue to support that resolution.

In the Middle East, Israel is continuing to hinder the implementation of the objective of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that region. It is doing so despite the numerous appeals made by the States of the region and by the General Assembly in its many resolutions on the issue, which were adopted by consensus, and despite the fact that the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) called on all States of the region that have not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the NPT.

Today, following the accession by the other States of the region to the NPT, Israel alone remains outside the Treaty, refusing to accede to it or to place its nuclear facilities under the integral safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It thus continues to pose a serious and ongoing threat to the security of the countries and peoples of the region as well as to maintain a flagrant imbalance to its benefit through its exclusive possession of nuclear capabilities.

In the area of conventional weapons, and in particular with respect to anti-personnel landmines, my country is following closely and supports the efforts of the international community to put an end to the present situation, in which these devices cause horrendous devastation among civilian populations, among others. My country has been involved in the Ottawa process as an observer. Tunisia also believes that the right of countries to the use of anti-personnel landmines for self-defence, the preservation of their territorial integrity and the protection of their borders should be taken into consideration.

Tunisia, a peace-loving country, is a party to all multilateral disarmament treaties and has a strong commitment to the cause of disarmament and to strengthening the foundations of security and stability in its region and worldwide. As such, Tunisia wishes to become a member of the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament. Tunisia would like to emphasize here the great importance that it attaches to the question of the expansion of the membership of the Conference. We believe that all countries that

legitimately wish to join this body as fully-fledged members, as my country does, should be able to do so. We urge the Conference to consider the candidatures that have been submitted to it in order to take a decision regarding its expansion.

The strengthening of the foundations for security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region is one of the priority goals towards which my country, Tunisia, has been working tirelessly and unwaveringly. My Government has endorsed and supported the universal values of democracy, tolerance and openness, which form the basis of its socio-political system, govern its balanced society in a spirit of solidarity and guide its foreign policy. Tunisia is therefore unswervingly pursuing its active role in the Mediterranean region. It is working with determination to strengthen the foundations of a comprehensive, multifaceted partnership between the two shores of the basin. That single partnership will allow the region to meet the collective challenges it now faces, in particular that of social and economic development and the struggle against terrorism and all other forms of extremism. It will allow us to build together a future of cooperation and lasting security that will transform this basin into a true lake of peace and prosperity. Inspired by this comprehensive concept of security, my country participates in the process of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and it will continue to do so.

We note with regret, however, that the Middle East problem continues to be a source of tension in that region. Israel is certainly not making it any easier to resolve that problem, as it continues to hinder the peace process.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to assure you, Sir, of its readiness to cooperate fully with you in bringing our work to a successful conclusion.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.